

**Listing of Claims:**

1 - 27 (Canceled)

28 (Currently Amended) A method for dispensing and evidencing postage indicia by a postage generating device (PGD) in a system having a plurality of PGDs that have been divided into  $n$  groups identified by a group designation  $G_i$ ,  $i = 1, \dots, n$ , the method performed by the indicia generating devices comprising:

- (a) receiving a master secret key  $K$  and a secret key  $K_i$  from a distribution center over a network after manufacture of the PGD, and storing the master secret key  $K$  and the secret key  $K_i$  in the PGD;
- (b) in response to receiving a request to generate an indicium for a mail piece destined for a particular postal destination  $Dest$ , generating the indicium;
- (c) computing a verification key  $V_i^{Dest}$  as a function of the secret key  $K_i$  and the postal destination;
- (d) computing a key ID  $I_i^{Dest}$  as a function of the master secret key  $K$  and the postal destination;
- (e) using the computed verification key  $V_i^{Dest}$  to create a digital signature for the indicia; and
- (f) digitally signing the indicia by including the digital signature and the computed key ID  $I_i^{Dest}$  on the indicia.

29 (Original) The method of claim 28 further including the step of computing each verification key  $V_i^{Dest}$  as a one-way function  $H$  of the PGD group key  $K_i$  and a designation of the postal destination:

$$V_i^{Dest} = H(K_i, Dest).$$

- 30 (Original) The method of claim 29 further including the step of using ZIP codes to designate the postal destination.
- 31 (Original) The method of claim 30 further including the step of computing each of the key ID's as a one-way function  $H$  of the PGD group,  $G_i$ , the master secret key,  $K$ , and a designation of the postal destination,  $Dest$ :